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ABSTRACT

Administrators, counselors, university faculty, and dropouts met initially to discuss the dropout problem and to design a questionnaire which was administered to 270 dropouts from secondary schools in 5 Missouri Ozark school districts and was designed primarily to determine the perceived need or desire for additional vocational or academic training and to indicate to the schools factors contributing to school dropout. As the project evolved, however, the purpose became that of discovering the life and labor situation of the dropout. Significant discrepancies noted between counselor and administrator preconceptions of dropouts and resulting data led to discussions of validity and the establishment of more effective programs, and raised the question of the appropriate application of research data. Followup meetings with dropouts began a process which led to the establishment of classes in preparation for the GED, the establishment of vocational outreach counselors, a survey of businesses and job opportunities in the area, and the establishment of Community Occupational and Training Counselors to combine school, community, and family resources to provide more effective career and vocational counseling programs for students of limited aspirations. It was tentatively concluded that field and evaluation research can be utilized to formulate plans, objectives, and programs intended to reduce school dropout rate and improve employability. (SB)

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A Research and Development Approach to Rural Education: A Case Study

by

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Paper prepared for presentation at the annual meeting of
the American Educational Research Association. San Francisco
California April 8-12 1979.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on the utilization of field and evaluation research in formulating plans, objectives and programs intended to reduce the school drop out rate and improve employability of students in three Missouri Ozark secondary schools. The work began five years ago with a public concern for the high rate of students dropping out of local schools and has evolved through a variety of measures taken in an attempt to ameliorate that perceived problem and several related conditions. The emphasis of the paper will be on the process from which the objectives and programs have evolved rather than on the content and outcomes of those activities per se.

The usual intent of social science research is to generalize to some population. That tends to be true whether the research is inspired by some discipline based problem or hypothesis or by the need to evaluate the consequences of some experimental program. Research undertaken for the purpose of "adding to the body of knowledge" need not be useful in an immediate pragmatic sense but there seems to be a widely shared conviction among social scientists that it should be. The spectre of becoming a recipient of one of Senator Proxmire's "Golden Fleece" awards is but one of many mechanisms contributing to a normative conformity regarding utilitarian research. At a minimum rationalizations are usually produced concerning the immediate or potential practical value of whatever research was undertaken.

A problem with our research undertaken for the dual purposes of generalization and utility has to do with who accepts it as

valid or as a basis for action. If research is done according to the accepted procedures of scientific inquiry then fellow research scientists can be expected to regard the research as "fact." However researchers are seldom in a position to implement their findings--that task typically falls to politicians, administrators, teachers and other practitioners who may or may not follow our rules of evidence. Whether they should or not is immaterial; whether they do is important to the actual usefulness of the research produced.

A question of interest to us concerned are the conditions under which research findings are valid and useful in development projects concerned with a specific problem in a specific socio-cultural context. Several problems are confronted: (1) the need to interpret implications of existing research for specific problem solving purposes; (2) the need to integrate a variety of research findings, research typically exists in fragmented form; and (3) the validity of research undertaken to generalize when it is attempted to apply research findings to any specific locality or situation. What is true in general may obviously be misleading in its application to any specific case.

The high school dropout project reported here is one of a number of projects coordinated by the Rural Development Office of the University of Missouri-Columbia. This office coordinates the Title V Rural Development program in Missouri.

The Title V program efforts are concentrated in southeast central Missouri.

The overall objective of the Title V program is to organize

combined research and extension efforts that are applicable to the solution of various kinds of community and area social, economic and resource problems. Each of the projects undertaken intended both to serve as a response to a regionally or locally generated problem and as an experiment in the development and application of problem related knowledge.

Several principles which serve as the basis for the work of the Rural Development Office are especially applicable to this project:

1. Problem-Solving Orientation. An invalid distinction is frequently made between basic and applied research by asserting that basic research is not relevant to the solution of some practical problem. While the overall objective of the Rural Development Office is problem-solving, it seeks to organize and provide for integration of work that is relevant to the problem and often this includes basic research.
2. Problems Identified by the Area. All projects in the Rural Development program are the result of a need or problem which is identified by some group or groups in the local area. Projects are continually re-evaluated and redefined; no long-range specific objectives are formulated for projects. This flexible evolution of project objectives is especially applicable to the dropout project.
3. Task Force Form of Organization. Most community and area problems do not conform to the boundaries of academic disciplines. The solution to most problems can be facilitated by the effective coordination of expertise from several

different disciplines. Task forces are organized to deal with a particular issue or problem and are dissolved when the task is completed. With reference to the dropout project, task force input has been in the form of program consultation and evaluation.

THE PROBLEM

In the six county area chosen as a pilot area for the rural development program 3 counties had a high school dropout rate among the highest in the state. Recent (1973) publicity of that fact had produced significant public concern for the "problem."

Discussions were held with area Extension faculty members and various citizens in the area. It was obvious that there was concern and interest in the problem. Three sources of information were identified as being important. One would be the teachers and school administrators who could provide some information about the system and another would be the parents of the dropouts. The dropouts themselves would be the most important source.

A tentative procedure was formulated as a tentative approach to the "problem." The first step was to hold a meeting with the counselors and administrators of the schools in the three counties which had the high dropout rate. The purpose of the meeting was to obtain opinions and insights about the dropout situation, to obtain their cooperation in doing a research study of previous dropouts and to get their suggestions as to what kind of questions should be dealt with in the survey.

The Assistant Director of Guidance Services, State Department of Education was contacted to discuss the plans. He agreed to

call a meeting of the schools in the three counties. The counselor and principal from each of the five high schools in the three counties attended.

The discussion centered around their perceptions of which students were dropping out and why. There was a general consensus that most dropouts were not active in extracurricular activities; drop out at 16; remain in the area and do get jobs, primarily in the timber industry or shoe factories. The group thought there was very little parental support for education and that the kids were responding to what the parents wanted them to do. Some, however, they thought, had no intention of getting a job--their parents were on welfare and they also expected to be. Although the school officials had very definitive perceptions of who the dropout was, the Rural Development staff proposed that a study be undertaken to find out other characteristics and attitudes of the dropout; the nature of the problem, if indeed a "problem" existed; and the satisfaction level of those who had dropped out relative to educational, occupational or academic status.

The schools agreed to cooperate in such a survey and to provide a list of dropouts from their schools for the ten-year period, 1964-1974. A ten-year cohort was agreed upon in order to obtain a longitudinal analysis of attitudes, satisfaction level, etc. while still maintaining a significantly high probability of locating the respondents. It was agreed, because of the intended emphasis on local programmatic follow-up, that the interview population consist only of those dropouts still residing in the

area.

The second step was to contact a number of university faculty to invite them to participate as a consultation group for the project. Faculty from 8 different departments were invited to attend a seminar discussion of the situation and the proposed problem oriented research and development project.

The first meeting of this group was a general discussion of the dropout situation and the possibility of beginning a project in the area. The second meeting of the consultation group, held after the meeting with the school personnel, dealt with the specific methodology to be employed in the study. At this point, the Rural Development Office proposed to develop a survey instrument to study such variables as motives, occupational and educational aspirations, aspirations of the parents with regard to the dropout, consequences of having left school, reasons for dropping out, background of family, perceived need for additional education or vocational training, etc. The intended purpose was to determine if dropping out was a problem or not, to determine perceived needs of those who had dropped out and to confirm or refute the perceptions of the school personnel.

As work progressed on the questionnaire, it was decided to try to meet with a group of dropouts to discuss the project with them and to solicit their help in questionnaire content and construction. In lieu of a group meeting, a member of the Rural Development staff spent several days talking informally with school personnel, students, dropouts and families of those having dropped out in two of the five districts. This provided

familiarity with the colloquialisms of the area, the belief systems, lifestyles, etc., which was valuable in the wording of the questions as well as in the content of the questionnaire.

Based on the pre-interviewing sessions in the area and an abundant literature review, it was decided to devise a personal interview schedule addressing the issues raised by the school personnel, the campus consulting group and the ORD staff supplemented by those suggested in the literature.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the interviews with the dropouts in the five school districts was, in order of importance to the project:

1. To determine the perceived need or desire for additional vocational and/or academic training and, should a need or desire be determined, to gain some insight into the nature of that training.
2. To be able to indicate to the schools those factors which, in the perspective of the dropouts contributed to his/her dropping out.
3. To provide data as a basis for determining possible responses, either by the schools or other interested agencies.
4. To provide baseline information on the dropout so as to be better able to generate an understanding of the phenomenon of "dropping out."

Through the evolution of this project, the purposes became clearer. What began as a response to concern with the dropout problem in the Meramec Area culminated in a distinct project whose purpose was to discover the life and labor situation of

the dropout, his/her aspirations and desires, the degree of agreement between the two, and to make a realistic attempt to lessen the gap (if indeed there was one) between their present situation and their aspirations.

Assumptions

Several operational assumptions were made prior to the study:

1. There was no prior assumption that the dropout was a "problem" or that dropping out of school was necessarily bad in the context of the local labor market.
2. It was assumed that a high school education was not necessary and/or beneficial to everyone.
3. There was no "prescribed solution" or "package remedy" to be used with regard to the prevention of "dropping out." Rather the research would serve as a basis for determining what actions, if any, might be appropriate.
4. It was assumed that locally generated research would be perceived as being more credible and valid and thus more likely to be acted on.

THE RESEARCH--METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Sample

A random sample of 268 dropouts in the five school districts in the three counties was selected from master lists of persons having dropped out of school within the past 10 years (1964-1974) who did not re-enroll in another school for the purpose of completing their secondary education, and who were currently

residing in the three-county area. These lists were provided by the five school districts. The lists were further refined through numerous contacts with agencies and knowledgeable persons in the communities.

A total of 1159 former students were included on the refined lists. From this list random samples with probability proportional to size were drawn for each of the five districts. The purpose was to be able to aggregate the separate samples but at the same time retain an identifiable sample for the information and guidance of each school separately. The total sample size was 270. To obtain the total sample a list of alternatives (also randomly selected) was provided interviewers in each district from which to select respondents to replace those who had moved or could not be located.

Interviews

The interviewing was conducted by nine interviewers who were selected for their knowledge of the area and its people. The interview schedule in its final form consisted of 11 pages, 145 items and required approximately 1-1/2 hours to complete. Initial responses to each item were often followed up with probing questions intended to obtain a better understanding of their thoughts, ideas and motivations related to having left school.

A training session was held for the interviewers by the Rural Development staff to go over the questionnaire and instructions and to talk about interview techniques and problems they might encounter. They also discussed possible sources of information in locating the dropouts in the sample.

Once interviewing began, it became apparent that much more time than anticipated would be required, due to difficulties in locating the respondents. Information was sought from country tax assessors and collectors, county clerks, sheriff's offices, Family Services, crossroads stores, and friends and neighbors. The telephone directory proved to be of virtually no use, as very few had telephones.

The interviewing was completed during the months of August, September and October of 1974.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

A brief report of the findings of the questionnaire are reported here and will help to set the stage for the activities that followed this phase of the project:

Biographical

The total sample of 268 respondents included 127 females (47.4%) and 141 males (52.6%). Their ages ranged from 15 to 29 at the time of the interview. There were 8.2% between the ages of 15-16, 55.6% between 17 and 21, and 36.2% between 22 and 29.

Marital Status and Number of Children

The marital rate of the female respondents was higher than for the males; 75.6% of the females were married while only 43.3% of the males were married. Of the females, 13.4% were divorced or separated; 5.7% of the males were divorced or separated.

Of the 182 respondents who were married, divorced or separated, 16% had no children, 66% had 1-2 children, 15.3% had 3-4 children and there was no response for 2.7%.

Family Background

It was found that 76.9% of the respondents lived at home with both parents at the time they dropped from school. An additional 13.8% lived with either the father or mother at that time. Ninety-two per cent reported living in only one household (refers to number of sets of persons lived with) while in high school. At the time of the interview, 27.2% were still living with their parents and 50.4% were living with their spouses and/or children.

Nearly one-half (48.1%) of the respondents came from families having from 4 to 7 children. Sixty-seven per cent of the respondents had siblings (one or more) who had left high school before graduation.

Physical Environment

Nearly 65% of the sample were residing in the rural areas at the time of the interview rather than in the towns where the high schools are located. While they were in school, most (85.4%) lived within 19 miles of the school they attended and 50.4% rode the bus for from 20-60 minutes one way per day. Of the total, 74.3% rode the bus on a full- or part-time basis.

Educational Background

Only 13.4% of the respondents' fathers and 18.7% of their mothers had completed high school. (The median educational level of the three counties is 8.9 years.) A majority of the respondents (71.2%) left school while they were in either their 19th or 11th grade (or at about age 16).

The grades in school, as reported by the respondents, follow

the normal curve fairly closely, with 7.8% making A's and B's, 51.5% making B's and C's or "average," 29.5% making C's and D's, and 6.7% making D's and F's. It should be emphasized that no attempt was made to check the grades as reported by the respondents with the school records.

Occupational Background

Nearly three-fourths (73.1%) of the respondents' fathers were employed in a manual occupation. Over one-half of the mothers were full-time housewives (52.6%), with another 11.9% holding part-time jobs. About one-third of the mothers were employed full-time.

Only about 22% of the respondents or their families were receiving any form of government income at the time they dropped from school. Of those, about one-half were either Social Security, retirement or similarly earned benefits; the other half or roughly 10% of the respondents reported their families received some type of public assistance at the time they dropped from high school. Ten per cent also reported receiving public assistance income at the time of the survey.

Those respondents who reported working away from home while they were going to school made up 39.2% of the total.

Their present employment status (at the time of the interview) indicated that 63% of the females and 29.8% of the males were not employed outside the home or had been laid off. Manual occupations were reported by 92% of those employed.

Fifty-four per cent of the respondents reported having no difficulty in finding jobs since leaving high school. Of those

who did indicate having trouble, only 28.8% felt that their lack of education or a diploma and/or experience, was the problem. Furthermore, 34.4% felt a better job would be hard to find even with a high school diploma.

School-Related Factors

The main reason given by respondents for leaving school was marriage and/or pregnancy-related problems--29.1% (69 females and 9 males). Out of 127 females in the sample, 113 were married, divorced or separated from their husbands at the time of the interview.

Other reasons were that they did not like school or were bored (21.6%), and financial or occupational problems, 9.3%. Conflict with their teachers and school administrators was another main reason (22.4%), and was the primary reason given by males (51 males, 9 females).

Sixty-five per cent perceived that school rules had some influence on students' decision to quite. Of the respondents, 30.6% reported that they had been either suspended or expelled while they were in school. (This percentage was largely influenced by the suspension policy of one school.)

Some students reported talking with teachers, counselors, principals or parents prior to dropping out, but 63.8% reported talking to no one before leaving school. More specifically, when asked if anyone tried to talk them into remaining in school, the subjects reported: Counselors, 20.2%; teachers, 13.9% principals, 7.3%; and superintendents, 2.1%. Fifty-two per cent reported that no one tried to talk them into staying in school.

Less than one-half (41.8%) felt that their school really wanted them to stay. Only 7.8% of the respondents' fathers and 7.5% of the mothers were seen as supportive of the respondents' decision to leave school. Nearly 15% reported their friends as being supportive of their decision to leave school.

About one-half (51.5%) felt that all the students were not treated equally; however, 64.2% felt that they were treated the same as other students. "Kids from prestigious families" were named as those treated differently by 36.1% of the respondents.

When asked for suggestions to improve the schools, the respondents felt school rules (19.1%), teacher attitude and behavior (15.5%), and personnel (13.5%) should be changed.

Sixty-seven per cent of the respondents believed that most people who drop out regret having left school. Forty-four per cent of the respondents perceived that other dropouts had trouble finding employment, but 51.9% felt that others do eventually find jobs.

When asked which subject in school they felt had done them the most good, 29.4% said math; 20.9%, English; 11.3%, history; and all other subjects reported were below 5%. This, however, could bear various interpretations. It could reflect the "indoctrinated responses" or it could be that they actually perceive math and English as being fundamental skills.

Even though 23.9% reported having taken businesses courses; 36.2%, shop courses; and 22.7%, vocational courses, these were only reported as having "done them the most good" by about 5%.

Only 40.7% of the respondents reported having participated

in extracurricular activities sometime during high school or junior high, and this diminished to 18.3% during the year the respondent dropped out of school.

Seventy-nine per cent (79%) of the respondents reported that a majority of their friends were in school at the time they dropped out. Fifty-nine per cent (59%) of the respondents reported they now regret having left school.

Future Plans and Aspirations

While 64.1% of the students felt they needed more education now, only 30.6% thought they would want to go back to high school to complete their education. Reasons given were "too old," (24.5%), "not necessary" (14.4%), "not here" (10.8%), etc.

Concerning High School Equivalency Tests, 71.3% indicated that they were aware of such tests. An interest in learning a skill or trade was expressed by 27.3%; of these mechanical trades were mentioned by 22.0%, and secretarial or nursing by 24.8%. Seventy-one per cent (71%) reported they would like to attend a vocational school.

With regard to these findings we would like to emphasize two points of relevance to the theme of this paper. One is the discrepancy between the data and the initial description of dropouts by school officials and counselors. The data differed from their initial perceptions on many points but most significantly with regard to dropout families' stability, receipt of public assistance and their role in discouraging their children from dropping out. With regard to the former dropouts themselves, there were important differences between officials perceptions

and data with regard to apparent peer group influence, educational aspirations and suspensions from school.

Upon completion of the data analysis the Assistant Director of Guidance Services at the State Department of Education called another meeting of the five schools in the project and the area Extension faculty involved to discuss the results of the research. Superintendents, principals and counselors, a juvenile officer and a school board member attended the meeting at which the composite findings from all five school districts were presented. The discordance between their perceptions and the data stimulated extensive discussion first challenging validity of the data and then searching for explanations for the discrepancies. Validity became an issue because of the discrepancy. After some discussion validity seemed to be accepted apparently for two reasons: (1) the procedures followed including the source and training of interviewers and the low refusal rate seemed to be adequate and (2) the data had been collected from their districts. On this second point it is probable that had the same data been obtained from a statewide random sample that it would not have been regarded as applicable to their districts--the situation there would have "been different."

That the validity of the data was at least tentatively accepted is indicated by a discussion that turned to possible reasons for the discrepancy between their perceptions and the data. One generally shared conclusion was that they were operating at least in part on selective perceptions. The data revealed that about 2/3 of the respondents reported having talked with no

one before leaving school. The "typical" dropout, if there was such a person, was one who simply did not come back for his junior year; a relatively anonymous student not very noticeable or active in student affairs. Those present at the meeting generally agreed that their overall impression of students dropping from their schools was influenced greatly by the more visible cases-- the behavior problems, those flunking out, etc. who would be more likely to come to the attention of counselors and administrators. Acceptance of the validity of these data had a notable influence on subsequent discussions concerning possible means of more effectively meeting the needs of both students still in school and those who had dropped out in the past.

A second point of relevance to us was the magnitude of difference in characteristics of the samples from each of the districts. The five districts are in adjacent counties and clearly belong to a similar socio-cultural region. However, just as it proved difficult to generalize to the category "dropout" so too did it prove difficult to generalize to the five schools. For example, unemployment among males who were interviewed ranged from a low 12 per cent in one district to a high of 47 per cent in an adjoining district. Similarly the percentage of women interviewed who were employed ranged from a low of 25 per cent to a high of 46 per cent. It is of interest to note that unemployment among females followed the same rank order as among males, indicating that it is probably the employment opportunities of the area that are the contributing factor rather than community norms concerning working women.

Other illustrative differences include sex of respondents-- the percentage of males among the dropouts ranged from a high of 64 per cent in one district to a low of 32 per cent in another; percentage who lived in town at the time they dropped from school ranged from a low of 15 per cent to a high of 55 per cent; percentage of dropouts who had ever lived outside the county ranged from a low of 36 per cent to a high of 62 per cent; per cent who reported school teachers or officials tried to talk them into staying in school ranged from a low of 21 per cent to a high of 65 per cent. Differences on almost all variables included in the study were of similar magnitude. This finding raises further questions concerning the appropriate sphere of application of research data. There will be further discussion of this point at the end of the paper.

RESPONDING TO NEEDS EXPRESSED BY INTERVIEWERS

Following the data reporting meeting with the school officials meetings were also arranged with dropouts who had been interviewed in each of the districts. A mail-out announcement was sent to each person interviewed in that area with a return card. A few days before the meeting, phone calls were made to some of the dropouts who were thought to be those who would especially have something to offer such a discussion. The purposes of these meetings were threefold: 1) to inform the dropouts what the study had shown about them collectively, 2) to get additional verification of the validity of the responses, and 3) most importantly, to obtain their ideas for both preventive and ameliorative approaches.

These meetings generally produced further validation of the survey results and somewhat surprisingly to us, considerable enthusiasm for completing high school via GED. Most realized that a diploma would do little to improve their prospects in the local job market but seemed to be interested more in terms of pride and enhanced self-concept.

Followup meetings were arranged to develop plans and procedures for facilitating GED completion for all interested young adults.

As each discussion group began and it was determined that they were interested in taking the GED, the STEP (Sequential Test of Educational Progress) was given to each participant to determine his/her level of competence.

In many cases where the persons involved were perhaps at a third grade math level, the text materials available did not seem appropriate. As an alternative, work sheets for math and English were prepared. The idea behind the work sheets was to help the person acquire a significant amount of useful and practical knowledge in a relatively short period of time. In addition, "locally relevant" examples were used in all cases instead of those often used in traditional textbooks.

Volunteer tutors from the communities and a staff member from Rural Development began working with each class. It became apparent however that a more formalized program would be needed to meet the demand. Therefore, shortly after the first group started, meetings were held with the State Director of Adult Education, State Department of Education, to discuss funding

for the courses from existing sources. Contacts were also made with the Directors of the Vocational Schools in the area to serve as organizers and supervisors of the courses. As a result six ABE classes were established in the three-county area.

Vocational Needs

It became evident in the group meetings with the dropouts that there was a general lack of knowledge of programs and services available in vocational, educational or employment areas. Although there was a great deal of interest among the dropouts in acquiring a trade or skill, attending vocational school, obtaining a high school diploma, etc. they were generally not aware of the programs and services available in the area or perceived that such opportunities were unavailable or inaccessible to them.

At first some attempt was made to introduce some of this information in the group meetings, but it soon became apparent that this was not the best way as only a few were interested in each alternative while the others lost interest, and it was impossible for one or two persons to meet all the needs outlined.

It seemed evident that direct individual counseling was needed. Thus, the concept of a vocational outreach counselor began to emerge.

Contacts were made with the Director of the Disadvantaged and Handicapped, State Department of Education, to determine if funds were available for a counselor to work with the dropouts in the area. The research and follow-up meetings having clearly established a need submission of a formal proposal was encouraged.

Meetings were then scheduled with school officials in the three counties to develop a proposal for a counselor. The suggestion was that a full-time person be hired for a year and two part-time persons be hired for the summer to work on an individual basis with persons who had previously dropped out of school in the five districts.

The request for funds for a one-year pilot project in Occupational and Training Field Work was made to the Office of Disadvantaged and Handicapped in the State Department of Education. The funds were for support of one full-time and two part-time (summer) persons to serve as Occupational Training Field Workers in the three counties from June 1, 1975, to May 31, 1976. The request as funded was for \$17,188, including salaries, travel and supplies.

The need for such a grant was based on the interview with the dropouts and the group meetings which indicated that a majority of these young adults perceived themselves as being handicapped by their educational status, were anxious to improve their level of education and skill, and were generally uninformed about the availability of educational, training and job placement opportunities. The difficulty experienced in the group meetings with trying to provide information of interest to everyone led to the conclusion that the most effective means of reaching and providing useful information to the target population (under 30, high school dropouts either unemployed or underemployed and living in one of the three counties) was through individual counseling. It was estimated that the target population in the

three counties numbered between 1,000 and 1,700 depending on the specific criteria applied.

An Area Advisory Board was formed, composed of the principal from each of the five schools, a young adult who had dropped out in each school district, and a representative from each of the three county Extension Councils. Specific responsibilities of the Advisory Board included selection of the Occupational and Training Field Workers, consultation and guidance in carrying out the program, general administrative duties and continuous evaluation of the project.

The total number of contacts made by the three Occupational and Training Field Workers during the summer of 1975 was 569 persons, with a total of 763 contacts. As outlined in the proposal, each of the three workers made initial contacts in their respective counties during the summer. The full-time worker was then to encompass all three counties for the remainder of the year. These initial summer contacts were to be the clientele base from which the full-time person would work in all three counties during the remainder of the year. It was found, however, that 483 of those persons initially contacted requested follow-up contacts. It became apparent that one person could not meet the demands of those requesting help in the three counties, given the geographic distances and the demand for service to additional clients. In one county alone, 143 new clients were contacted after the summer work was completed, largely due to word-of-mouth referral from the summer clientele and others in the community.

Therefore, it became necessary for the full-time worker to primarily concentrate on the clientele in the one county where he had made the initial contacts.

The Occupational and Training Field Worker found that it was difficult to help clients find jobs. No one seemed to know what the demand was for various skills, what training would be helpful, or the local job market demands. Therefore, the Occupational and Training Field Worker, with the assistance of the Rural Development Office, conducted a survey of all employers and businesses in two counties during January, February and March of 1976.

Three hundred seven businesses, virtually every business in the two counties, were interviewed.

The purpose of the survey was to serve as a basis from which to assess the employment situation in these counties; provide the Occupational and Training Field Workers with accurate, specific knowledge of available jobs, necessary training and other requirements; and to build rapport with employers in the area so that a better referral network for job placement could be set up.

The results proved helpful in several ways: (1) Few employers (only 21%) preferred voc-tech trained employees. This information, coupled with the knowledge that most clients did not want to leave the area, indicated to the Occupational and Training Field Worker that encouraging wholesale enrollment in voc-tech school as a means of gaining local employment would only increase the clients' disenchantment on finding out that local jobs were not available to voc-tech trained persons.

(2) Three-fourths of the businesses are located in towns,

one-fourth in rural areas. Several types of businesses are fairly common: grocery store (9%, n = 27); gas station (6%, n = 19); department store (4%, n = 12); restaurant (4%, n = 12); mines (2%, n = 7). Automobile related businesses (gas stations, body shops, etc.) accounted for 19% of all businesses in the area.

(3) More than half of all businesses had from one to four employees, including the employer. Forty-one per cent (41%) of businesses hired no one during the preceding year (1975). Sixty-six per cent (66%) expected to hire no one during the coming year.

(4) Eighty per cent of the employers said they do not call the Regional Employment Security Office when or if they have a vacancy. This corresponds with 86% who said they would support a local employment service.

(5) Seventy-one per cent said they would hire an employee without a high school diploma. Seventy per cent of the employers report their employees are trained on-the-job and 63% prefer not to hire previously trained employees.

One of the objectives of the proposal was to establish effective working relationships between the clients and the various manpower resource agencies in the area such as Employment Security, Community Action Agencies, Vocational Rehabilitation, Area Vocational Training Schools, and so forth.

During the year, 165 contacts were made with agencies and organizations. It was anticipated that the Occupational and Training Field Worker would act primarily as a referral source by directing clients to the appropriate agencies. However, this failed to be effective as many of the existing agencies could

not readily meet the needs of the target population. For example, Employment Security proved to be of little help in finding jobs for clients as they already had far more clients than they could handle. In addition, as was learned from the employer survey, most employers do not list job openings with Employment Security. Thus, it was necessary to modify the role of the field worker from one of facilitating agency access to performing direct agency-type functions which, of course, increased the work load.

Based on the accumulated experience and research during April and March, 1976, a proposal was submitted to the Area Manpower Planning Board (LAMPB) through the Area Voc-Tech School for funding of a vocational outreach program. This program, as it was conceptualized, involved the employment of an outreach worker who would act as a representative of the Area Voc-Tech School in setting up statellite GED classes, securing students for enrollment and providing encouragement for continued attendance--in short, continuing on a full-time basis one function of the Occupational and Training Field Worker.

This proposal was submitted to the LAMP Board as a companion proposal to the Community Education Counseling Program, which involved the hiring of an out-of-school counselor by one of the school districts to provide occupational, vocational and educational assistant to potential dropouts and their families. The Vocational Outreach program was approved by the LAMP Board for funding through regular CETA monies; the Community Education Counseling program was recommended for the Governor's four per cent discretionary funds. Both proposals were ultimately

rejected, however, by the State Office of Manpower Planning as being too "education-oriented" and not enough "manpower-related."

At this time, several points can be made about the Occupational and Training Field Work project which led to the development of the new proposal:

1. The Occupational and Training Field Work program was a necessary prerequisite to the new Community Occupational and Training Counselor program.
2. It established a cooperative relationship among the schools so as to enhance future relationships.
3. It clearly established the need for a program directed toward dropout prevention and demonstrated the effects of a continued high dropout rate in the community.
4. It redefined the situation from being a "school problem" to a "community problem." This was a crucial realization if any headway was ever to be made in dropout prevention.
5. A simple continuation of the Occupational and Training Field Work program by the schools would not have demonstrated nearly as great a commitment to the principles involved as does the new Community Occupational and Training Counselor program.

A three-year program for Community Occupational and Training Counselors was funded for \$90,000 by the Office of Career Education, State Department of Education, for the period of August 15, 1976, to July 31, 1979. Three school districts (of the original 5) became involved in the joint program which provides for community, family and school involvement in the educational,

vocational and career development of students of limited aspirations. The superintendent of one school was named project director.

The purpose of the COTC program is to establish a demonstration program combining school, community and family resources to achieve more effective and locally relevant career education programs, occupational and vocational counseling and educational experiences for students of limited aspirations.

This purpose was based on several conclusions: That more effort needs to be addressed to dropout prevention; that the problem is a community problem and not confined to the school; that potential dropouts perceive a lack of relevance in the education provided in terms of their interest and aspirations; and that dropping out of school is a family phenomenon (having older siblings drop out increases the probability that others in the family will also).

An out-of-school counselor is employed in each of the three school districts and is administratively responsible to the respective school and to the Area Advisory Board which was set up under the previous program and continued under the current one. The counselors maintain an office at the school to facilitate access to student records and to increase accessibility to and communication with teachers and counselors.

The responsibilities of the counselors are to establish and maintain contact with high school and junior high students and their families in the three school districts who: (1) Have limited occupational aspirations and are, for the most part,

confined to the area in which they are attending school, and/or

(2) Have no plans for post-secondary education or training. The target population will be identified by a questionnaire completed by each student and/or teachers, counselors and administrators in the schools acting as referral sources. Part of the counselors' job is to provide information of an occupational and vocational nature to these students and their families counseling for career planning. They are responsible as well to provide counseling for career planning. They are also responsible for establishing and maintaining rapport with local employers and businesspersons and for establishing, in conjunction with the schools, a career education program whereby local employers are brought into the school.

Community Occupational and Training Committees have also been established in each of the three school districts, composed of local businessmen and employers, local government officials, local school administrators, school board members and members of target student families. This committee will provide advisory services to the schools and counselors in each community for the purpose of increasing the local relevance of the program, and providing the necessary backup to insure student exposure to local occupational opportunities and careers. It will also provide a liaison with employers, community leaders and local government officials to increase employment opportunities, expand on-the-job training opportunities, assist with bringing in employers for career education programs and to help establish a more effective system of job placement in the community.

An evaluation and advisory team composed of four persons from the University Departments of Vocational Education, Guidance and Counseling and Educational Administration and one person from the Columbia Public School System with responsibility for Adult Education has been organized to deal specifically with the Community Occupational and Training Program.

Quarterly and annual evaluation reports have been produced which have been based on systematic data collection from the COTC counselors and from some of the student counselees. This evaluation research has been performed by a graduate student in the UMC Department of Counseling and Personnel Services working under the general supervision of the above evaluation committee and the Rural Development Office. These reports have served as the basis for continual modifications of methods and procedures. The COTC is an emerging role - one which was specified in the initial proposal but with the proviso that evaluation would be used as the basis for clarifying that role and modifying the job description as the data might indicate.

Even though a basically standard program was proposed across the three districts the evaluation has shown among other things that the COTC role is carried out quite differently in each of the districts.

Building on the accumulated experience and research data the three districts submitted a proposal which was approved for a youth employability project. This project of eighteen month duration consists of four major features: (1) experimentation with contract vocational education - a concept which emerged

from a combination of COTC experience, data from the employer survey, the original drop-out data and the experience of the adult counselor (2) intensive in-service training for teachers emphasizing incorporation of career education concepts in classroom instruction as well as the development and use of locality relevant instructional materials (3) student operated career information and job placement centers in each school - production of information and protocols on occupations found in the district and vicinity and (4) continuation of the COTC role. The features of this project are being evaluated by a team of economists and vocational education specialists from the University of Missouri. They have contracted directly with the consortium of schools for this service.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions from this experience are tentative and limited. The project was begun with a dual intent - to provide assistance in responding to a publicly perceived problem and to experiment with some procedures and methods pertinent to problem identification, project formulation and knowledge development.

With regard to the first objective there have been modest accomplishments. No dramatic changes have occurred. For each project the numbers have justified the project's support but these have been relatively small investments in relation to the total program and budget of the three districts. Few students are dropping out today without at least some attempt to evaluate the wisdom of that decision for the individual student. Subjectively there probably is more effective rapport between school

and community than would have occurred without the various projects. There seems to be greater sensitivity to the needs of lower aspiration students on the part of administration, counselors and teachers. Each of the schools in its own fashion seems more innovative - more committed to experimenting with new ideas.

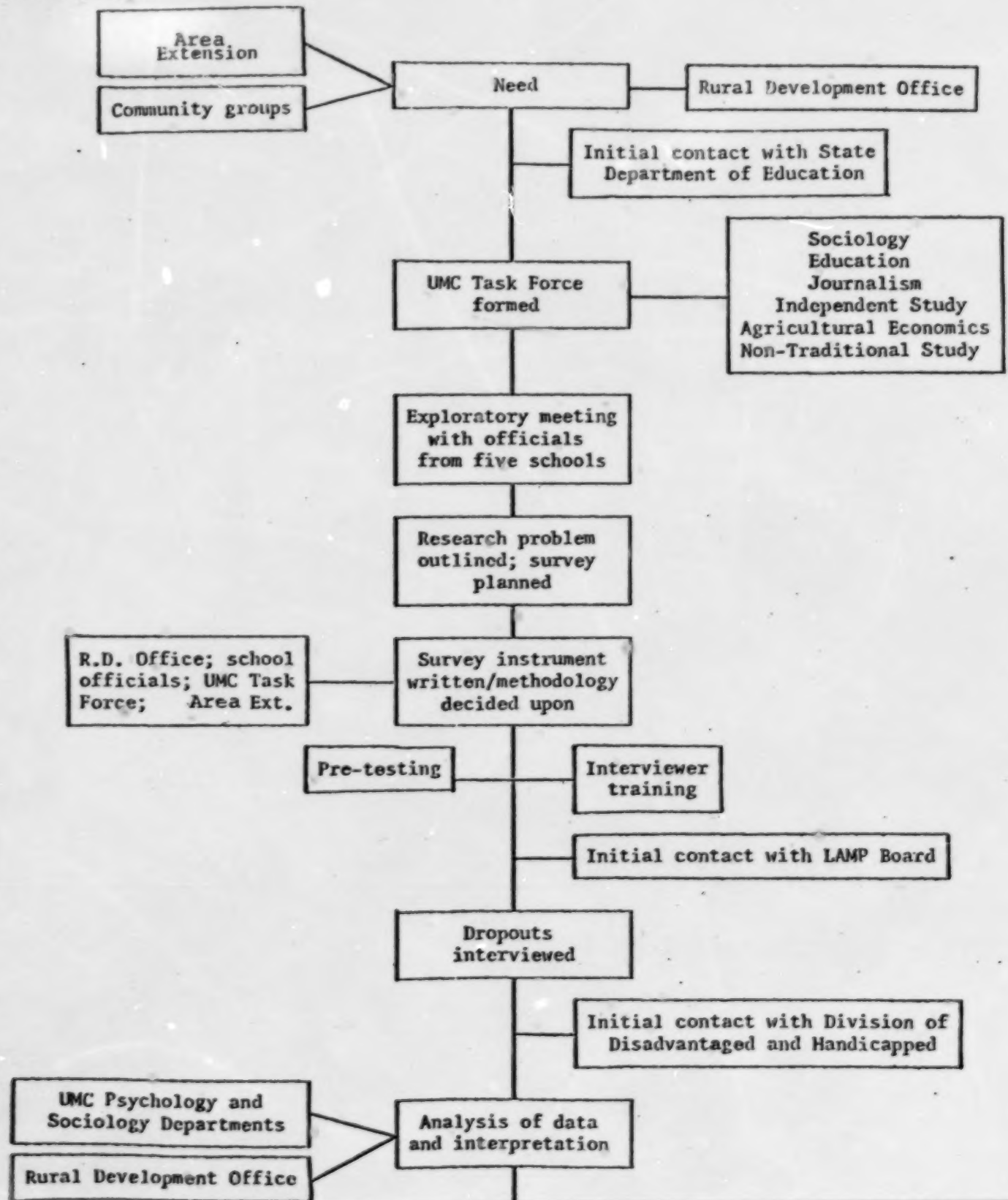
With regard to the procedures followed (the original intent of the project was to generate procedures that might be replicable rather than projects or program ideas) several tentative conclusions emerge:

1. Field research can produce information which is contrary to local conventional wisdom. However where such is the case the validity is likely to be challenged thus if the research fails to meet accepted standards of validity its value for redefining a problem or changing perceptions is likely to be lost. Thus the notion that applied research can be less rigorous than academically inspired research is questionable.
2. With some technical assistance adequate field research can be produced rather inexpensively. In addition the perceived validity and utility of the research appear to be enhanced if those potentially effected by its findings are involved in the research process.
3. The process of discussing implications of research findings for programs and projects is productive of new ideas and approaches adapted to the local situation.

4. Locally generated research can sensitize administrators, program directors and others to the diversity of interests and needs of their constituencies which particularly in rural areas are often assumed to be homogenous.
5. At the risk of rediscovering the wheel the project focused on developing participation in generating potential solutions to perceived problems. This is in contrast to an emphasis on technology transfer. Periodic feedback from evaluation research is instrumental in keeping such a process going.
6. Such locally generated research findings can be extremely important in documenting needs serving as a basis for supplementary and outside financial support.

DROPOUT PROJECT

PHASE I - RESEARCH



PHASE II - IMPLEMENTATION

